

Crew Stories: Fishing in the Gulf of Mexico

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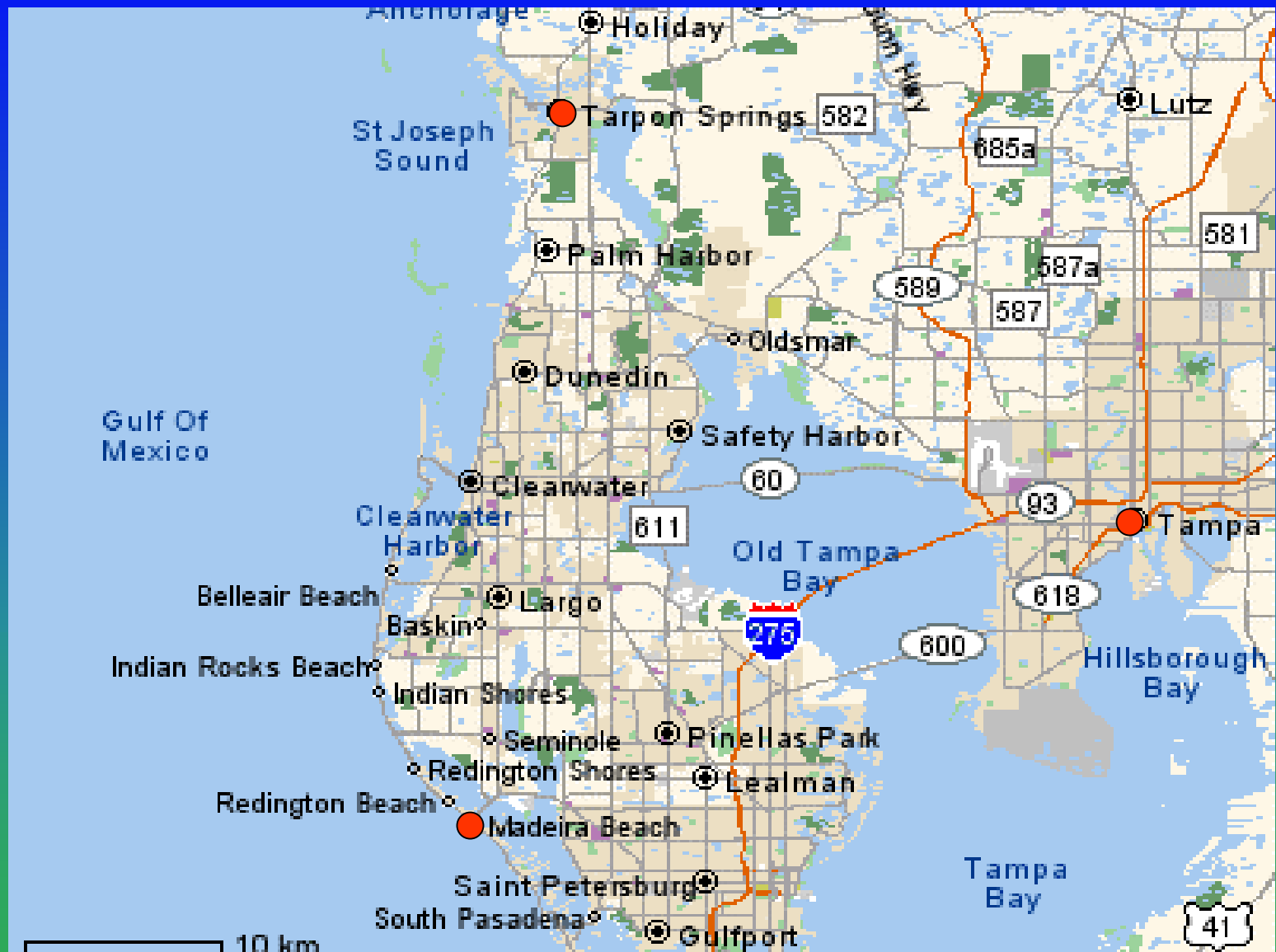
Crew Survey

- Federal regulations require that we consider the impacts on fishermen, fishing dependent businesses, and fishing dependent communities
- Little data available on crew



Research on Florida Gulf Crew





Tarpon Springs, Tampa, & Madeira Beach



Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico



Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico

Shrimp



Anecdotal Information About Crew

- High turn over rate
- Young people not becoming crew
- Hard to find new people
- Only show up when they run out of money



Anecdotal Information About Crew

- Crew are transient
- Many are alcoholics or drug addicts
- Not used to working hard
- Running from something
- Not trained for other work



Questions For Crew Members

Demographic Information

- Place of birth
- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Family background
- Education
- Family life



Crew Demographics

- From all over the US and other countries
- Predominately white
- Mostly male
- Most over 30
- Most are single
- Some have family members in fishing
- High school education or less

Questions For Crew Members

- How/why they started fishing
- How many years as a fisherman



Why They Fish

- Started as a job in the summer
- Helped a relative part time
- Fishing did not require formal training
- After problems with the law, a job they could get
- Liked the travel and adventure
- Away from people
- Did not want a 9-5 job or “normal” job setting

Why They Fish

“...the first time
I worked on a
shrimp boat, I
knew this job
was for me...”



How Long They Have Fished

- Some have fished most of their adult life
- In the Gulf, fishing may be part of what they do, including construction, working on oil rigs, or other supplemental jobs



Questions For Crew Members

Life of a fisherman



Being Crew

- Crew members are very transient
- Have fished in many areas in Gulf and the Atlantic
- Most switch from boat to boat
- Change boats when problems with other crew or the captains
- Switch boats when space available
- Some change fisheries with the seasons

Being Crew

- Shrimping: out for up to 28 days at a time
- Back on shore for 3-4 days
- Fishing: out for up to 30 days at a time
- Back on shore for 3-4 days
- Long shifts fishing or shrimping and handling gear, driving the boat
- Lose touch with what is happening on shore

Being Crew

- Some don't have a permanent address
- Stay with friends, in hotels, or on the boat when in shore
- Few personal belongings
- No investments, retirement, or savings
- Avoiding taxes



Life of a Fisherman

- Like best about fishing
- Like least about fishing
- Salary



What They Like About Fishing

“...I used to be a pipe fitter then I got into shrimping... I like the freedom of being out on the water...the peace of mind...”



What They Like About Fishing

“...I like the serenity of the water... each day is different...each sunset is different...”



What They Don't Like About Fishing

- Long hours
- Being away from home and family
- Difficult to have and keep relationships
- Unpredictable weather
- Problems with other crew and captains
- Problems with boat
- Too many regulations
- Wholesale price for product, salary

Like Least About Fishing

“...not much money to be made now...same salary as ten years ago...difficult to have a relationship...”



Questions For Crew Members

Goals

- To be a captain
- Own their own boat
- Continue as crew



Captain or Crew?

- Some would rather be crew
- Do not have a captain's license
- Like the physical work
- Too much responsibility to be a captain with fishing regulations, crew problems, management
- No credit to buy a boat
- Not a good time to buy a boat

Captain or Crew

“Less physical work as captain, more money to be made.”



Questions For Crew Members

- What they do when not out at sea



Time Not Fishing

- Go to bars
- Sleep
- See friends and family
- Watch TV
- Work and boats and gear
- Prepare for next trip



Questions For Crew Members

- Changes in the fisheries
- Their opinion of federal fishing regulations
- What would help them



Should Fishing be Subsidized?

- Some fishermen think the government should subsidize them like they do farmers
- The price they get at the dock is dropping while the price in stores goes up
- Most fishermen think their salary is low
 - They can not save or invest for future
 - Can not support a family
 - Don't own property

Fishing and the Environment

- Stocks are dropping
- Too many boats
- Too much pollution
- Fishing stocks are fine



Shrimping in Crisis

- Low prices paid to shrimpers for shrimp due to imports
- 88% shrimp consumed in US imported
- Need to tax imports



Shrimping in Crisis

- Hard to compete with Vietnamese who use family labor



Crew Interviews in Louisiana

- Grand Isle, shrimping most important
- Some big shrimp and fish boats
- Many shrimp boats homeported there
- Use small boats in state waters, on the water 48 hours or less
- Crew born there and part of the community
- Many of crew extended family or friends

Common Themes

- Crew do not have insurance
- Many have not paid social security
- No retirement
- Wonder if they will still have a job in a few years
- Believe their voice not heard by NMFS and Councils
- Hard to make a living shrimping or fishing

Questions For Crew Members

If they could
not fish...



What's Next?

“... I am 55 years old...too old to go back into construction...**I will shrimp until I die...**”



Questions For Crew Members

- Future of fishing



Future of Fishing

“I would not want
any of my kids to
be a fisherman...”



Future of Fishing

“There will always be fish...and there will always be fishermen...”



Lessons Learned

- Not possible to do a statistical sample of crew
- Can do a descriptive sample of crew
- Need to go back to docks many times to find people to interview



Lessons Learned

- Not all crew alike
- May or may not be part of a community
- Understand the crew within the context of where they are from
- Necessary to interview crew from many locations



Next Step For Crew Stories

- Continue to do informal interviews
- Develop a survey instrument for crew
- Use some of their stories in fishing management plans



